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Statement submitted by International Federation on Ageing, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

The wellbeing and security of women is negatively impacted by the accumulation of various levels and types of gender-based discrimination experienced throughout their lives. Therefore, it is unsurprising in later life, women have significantly diminished financial capacity and less access quality services and public infrastructure. Older women, or 54 per cent of those over the age of 60 years and 61 per cent over the age of 80 years, face the potential of being invisible in critical components of sustainable development unless disparities are addressed urgently. The International Federation on Ageing, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, strongly advocates for the Commission to address the following inequalities experienced by older women.

Social Protection Systems

Older women face a high risk of experiencing poverty due to a multitude of factors reported in the International Labour Organization's (ILO) recent World Report on Social Protection (2017). The persistent gender gap in access to income security in older age mirrors the gender inequalities in employment and labour market trends. The contributory pension coverage is lower among women as their formal employment wages tend to be lower and women are often more likely to shorten or interrupt employment, work in precarious or informal employment, and take on a larger portion of family and homemaking duties. These factors contribute to women having lower pension entitlements than men to provide for income security in later life.

According to the International Labour Organization, universal health care is an essential component of social protection floors and fighting poverty. However, 38 per cent of the global population does not have health protection and only five per cent have no out-of-pocket spending for long-term care. This is problematic as older women experience disproportionately higher financial insecurity when universal health coverage is inadequate. In part, this is because older women have an increased risk of having multiple chronic comorbidities and/or disabilities in comparison to both younger women and older men. To make matters worse, since older women are more likely to have less financial means, they are less able to pay for and access health services if universal health care is not available.

Sustainable Infrastructure

Sustainable infrastructure is required to enable and encourage people of all ages and genders to participate in society through employment and social and civic activities. However, components of infrastructure such as transportation, water, electricity, and information and communication technologies (ICTs) are not designed with consideration of diverse functional abilities or promoting age-inclusivity. Older women can also face barriers to utilizing infrastructure developments such as prohibitive transportation costs or lack of ICT accessibility and training.

Recommendations

With a vision of a world where the rights and choices of older women are protected and respected, the undersigned advocate for the Commission on the Status of Women to call on Member States to adopt the following recommendations.

Specific social protection measures should be put in place to mitigate inequalities experienced by older women and bridge the income security gap in later life (thus addressing SDG 1), such as:

- Provide supplementary coverage through non-contributory pension schemes.
- Expand coverage to a wider range of employment sources including self-employment.
- Recognize care provision as 'decent work' and facilitate fairer distributions of care responsibilities.
- Implement preventative policy measures such as removing differential pension ages, crediting pension accounts during parental leave, and other policies that promote equitable treatment of men and women.
- Ensure that universal health coverage includes medical products, assistive devices as well as programs for the prevention of NCDs to enable women to improve and maintain their functional ability across the life course without experiencing unnecessary financial hardship.

Infrastructure and technology must be more inclusively provided to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 9 and 11, thus enabling women to continue living full and productive lives as they grow older. To do so, Member States are invited to consider:

- Supporting municipalities to join the World Health Organization's Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities.
- Consulting with older women for major infrastructure developments.
- Implementing programs and policies that promote digital inclusion of older women.

The International Federation on Ageing (IFA) thanks the Commission for the opportunity to advocate for the rights of older women and is ready and willing to collaborate on initiatives to ensure that older women are not left behind in advancements in social protection, public services, and sustainable infrastructure.

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